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**ABSTRACT**

Personnel at Saint Louis University's Department of Education have been theorizing, researching, and enlarging an approach to program evaluation that focuses heavily on the place of values in making judgments. This work originally stemmed from general curriculum evaluative theory developed by James H. McElhinney and Richard C. Kunkel. The content of the theory presented here contains: arguments for a theory of evaluation with explicit quality criteria; some quality criteria currently part of the perception-based model; a statement of the theory and operational paradigms; some polemics developing as the theory is being applied; and a brief section summarizing the theory's applications. In the perception-based model of evaluation proposed, certain value criteria are not open to negotiation in the sense that along with accepting the evaluator personally, the primary audience must accept five quality criteria inherent in the model. The model assumes a values-oriented evaluation encompassing the following criteria: holism, helpfulness toward program improvement, evaluator vulnerability, acceptance of both hard (observable) and soft (subjective) data sources, and facilitation of planning a program's future. Additional quality criteria are negotiated with individual audiences. (Author/HV)

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A PERCEPTION-BASED MODEL OF PROGRAM  
EVALUATION: A Values Oriented Theory

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A PERCEPTION-BASED MODEL OF PROGRAM  
EVALUATION: A Values Oriented Theory

For nearly four years personnel at Saint Louis University's Department of Education have been theorizing, researching, and enlarging an approach to program evaluation that focuses heavily on the place of values in making judgments. This work originally stemmed from general curriculum evaluative theory developed at Ball State University by James H. McElhinney and Richard C. Kunkel (Kunkel and McElhinney, 1969). For further history of the theory's development, the reader is referred to "A Narrative History of Project Values" (Smorodin and Kunkel, 1977).

The content of the theory presented here contains: the arguments for a theory of evaluation with explicit quality criteria; some quality criteria currently part of the perception-based model; a statement of the theory and operational paradigm; some polemics developing as the theory is being applied; and a brief section as summary of theory and application.

The intent of this theory paper is to present the current operational theory being used and developed at Saint Louis University. While the theory is based on certain values (see quality criteria section here-in) the actual statement of the theory comes from the phenomenon of perception.

The statement of explicit quality criteria has been derived both from our own efforts at program evaluation and reviewing other literature and theorists in program evaluation.

## The Need for a Theory of Evaluation With Explicit Quality Criteria

It appears current evaluation models can create methodologically sound strategies but credibility tends to be lacking unless some process exists for making the operational values of both the evaluated and evaluators overt. Furthermore, these overt values need to be incorporated into the evaluation itself. Support for this position has been persuasively advanced by Weckworth:

First, there is no one way to do evaluation; second, there is no generic logical structure which will assure a unique "right method of choice." Third, evaluation ultimately becomes judgment and will remain so, so long as there is no ultimate criterion for monotonic ordering of priorities; and fourth, the critical element in evaluation is simply: who has the right, i.e., the power, the influence, or the authority to decide. (1969, p. 48).

It is the purpose of this section to offer a theoretical model which strives for credible synthesis. It assumes that there are no theories--only personal perceptions of theories and this is what will keep the model dynamic (Polanyi, 1966). A model is therefore perceived as a body of interrelated criteria, which in the case of the proposed model are quality criteria. These (quality) criteria present a concise view of a topic. The topic's focus is a function of the builder's personal frame of reference (Alkin, 1968). Specifically, perceptions and judgments are a function of the author's qualitative viewpoint. By making overt the vulnerable judgments of both evaluators and those being evaluated, a synthetic picture of what the evaluation intends to focus on can be negotiated. Through negotiation, operative values can be embodied in the major evaluation questions asked. In add-

ition, these values can serve as judgment criteria for decision-making.

In the perception-based model of evaluation proposed, certain value criteria are not open to negotiation in the sense that along with accepting the evaluator personally, the primary audience must accept five quality criteria inherent in the model. That is, the model assumes a values-oriented evaluation encompassing the following criteria: holism, helpfulness toward program improvement, evaluator vulnerability with the audience, acceptance of both "hard" and "soft" data sources of portray reality, and facilitation of planning a program's future. Additional quality criteria are negotiated with individual audiences.

#### Quality Criteria for the Perception-Based Model

##### Quality 1: Holism

The model should be holistic rather than distort the total evaluation picture with an undue emphasis on quantification. Toward this end both statistical and existential forms of inference should be combined and repeatedly tested against experiential perceptions.

There is no way of surveying the whole of reality since one has no assurance that he has experienced anything more than an infinitesimal sample of it. Thus, when model builders attempt to determine "reality" within their own model, the total picture is lost. Rather what is created is a maze of theories which try to reduce the excluded aspects of the included ones. But there is no opening in this finite maze. For example, the natural sciences have limited the conception of nature to that which can be empirically investigated, i.e., the mere description of observable experience. But not all of reality can be observed. We do not object to the scientific method, but only to the regarding it as exhaustive of cognitive method.

Support for this particular criterion is especially strong in the work of French change theorist, George Allo (1961, 1968). Science, claims Allo, necessarily fragments reality when it abstracts. He challenges an empirical procedure in the specific case of value studies because by definition values involve evalua-

tional totality, not merely valuational fragments. One can see parallels in Allo's research methodology to the pedagogy of the oppressed devised by Paulo Freire (1970a). Both have directed their efforts toward the reduction of ethnocentrism and attempted a holistic orientation by means of testing knowledge through action which is critical, dialogical and reflective.

#### Quality 2: Helpfulness Toward Program Improvement

The model should be helpful in terms of facilitating the commitment of all parties concerned to program improvement. The values of the evaluator and the evaluated are exposed by negotiation. By placing responsibility for change directly in the hands of the evaluated, it becomes increasingly probable that both evaluator and the evaluated will better understand a system's value positions in their totality. Improvement of a system's operation can then result while its "core values" remain respected and intact (Goulet, 1968).

#### Quality 3: Quantitative and Qualitative Dimensions of Reality

The model should recognize that application of both "hard" (observable) and "soft" (subjective) is necessary and appropriate only at certain moments in a specified sequence. In order to accurately describe a program at any point in time (which is reflection of our process emphasis) truth is tested through a theoretical framework of both quantification and qualification. Using this eclectic approach, it is hoped that distorting biases (eg. positivism and reductionism) can be reduced.

#### Quality 4: Evaluation Vulnerability

The theory should deal with the elitism of the evaluator as the possessor of distinct skills and a quasi-mystical information base in order to avoid manipulation of the evaluated. In his exploration of the assumptions of Western social scientists, Goulet has discussed the damaging ramifications of elitism. He contends that "researchers practice a new form of clericalism--not of ordained clerks, but of methodologists initiated to the exclusive task of explaining reality's crucial dimensions (1971, p. 221). By recognizing that one's perceptions confirm, continue, enlarge, and eventually, correct one another, it is possible for the evaluator to syn-  
thetically enter into the perceptual systems of the evaluated. Disagreements may well occur fro the same event is perceived by each individual from a different

perspective. These disagreements are removed, at least they are considered as removable by discussion and mutual criticism, and negotiation.

Taken together, the perceptions of all involved represent a picture of reality which is more accurate than one observes. By being open to the multiplicity of perceptual experiences of both his own and those being evaluated, the evaluator is not trapped in a narrow consciousness of egocentrically determined "reality." Thus, by developing the evaluation in a dialogical way so that both the evaluated and evaluators participate actively in overtly defining the ground rules of program improvement, manipulation can be prevented and an accurate picture of reality articulated. Through commitment to seeking multiple realities of truth the evaluator can be a responsible decision-maker and future planner.

#### Quality 5: Vision of the Future

Probability plays a key role in both evaluation and educational research. It develops a "sort of" game. Both follow certain rules and are contained within certain boundaries which create a sense of order; the players in each game like to delude themselves with the belief that they are operating in a realm independently of "ordinary" life; and the players must flaunt certain credentials as possessors of an exclusive information base. Considering the extent of superfluosity operating in education, the need for program evaluation is urgent in an "ordinary" sense which extends the concept beyond enjoyment.

Another distinction between these "sort of" games can be seen in empiricism's tendency to develop as a closed system directed toward refinement of previously stated positives and holistic program evaluation's proactive orientation to the novel and open future. To the empiricists, research outside of the positivistic paradigm is valued only after a full-blown crisis destroys any viability for the established principles of the scientific method (Kuhn, 1962). Currently the reactive nature of empiricism is shaking the structure of science, with the resulting realization that future planning is important and "possible in fields lying outside of the bounds of absolute scientific causality..." (Gordon, 1969, 73). Thus, a proactive evaluator must base his conclusions and recommended course of action on his judgment of an improved, "better" willed reality.

#### The Theory Statement and Operational Paradigm

Based on the criteria set forth in the preceding section and

particularly on its holistic orientation, perception emerges as the crux of the present model. When one captures the physiological/psychological act of perceiving, at least three processes are occurring simultaneously yet somewhat discretely. These processes involving focusing the perception, describing the perception, and judging the perception. Each of these processes occurs confluent with the other and when taken as a total form the theoretical basis for judgment/evaluation. Thus, the theory behind the perception-based approach to evaluation comes from choosing a reality that is in itself based on multiple realities. Perception is considered the central course of evidence which permits the interpretation of data. In a specific sense, perception is defined as what individuals report as their descriptions of events, activities, and values. Quantitative definitions of perceptions such as one finds in neurological and sense datum expositions have been found to be limited for our purposes, and the necessity of a definition which also incorporates Polany's (1966) 'tacit dimension' has become increasingly apparent. "We have seen how the quality of the senses are both determinate and indeterminate, and, therefore, how a reality is directly present to consciousness, but present only partially... Such is the character of the world apprehended by subjectivity." (Earle, 1955, p. 99). Consciousness is conceived as an on-rushing stream of prereflective experience, which man lives through rather than knows about, and which is tied to some concept of time. (Schutz, 1967; Bergson, 1910, Merleau-Ponty). Perception becomes a personal description of the world-as-perceived.

At this point it should not be forgotten that a person does not report a 'purely objective, description' only good or bad,

better or worse descriptions which involve selective and systematic distortions. An evaluator must consciously deal with the fact the individuals selectively perceive, interpret, and place meaning upon their world, and then act accordingly. In fact, the solid facts of society are these perceptions, definitions, interpretations, and meanings which enable the perceiver to operate effectively most of the time in the face of incomplete information or under conditions of impaired observations. Franz From (1971), a Danish psychologist, believes perceptions of another's actions depend upon our familiarity with such factors as the type of action sequence played, situational norms, the actor or persons of his type, and whether we know something about how this kind of man usually behaves. As our familiarity with these factors becomes increasingly vague, "we see that others do something or other, but not what they are doing, or the experience becomes very disjointed without any connection or transition between the details. These may in such a case be given a more comprehensive, rather imprecise, sense. . ." (p. 91).

The intention, even beyond our explicit thoughts, has been to open the sphere of reality to whatever we know and therefore, beyond the constrictions of quantifiable sense perceptions of physical substance (i.e. the observable). This view, therefore, permits as real: subjectivities, selves, personalities. All perceptions have a mode of being distinctly peculiar to themselves, and reducible neither to physical existence, biological life, sheer duration, nor to instantaneous actuality.

In a general sense, perception refers to what someone judges in terms of the overall theoretical construct. Judgment is viewed

as the subjective act which wills something as true, in effect a "willed reality" (Earle, 1955, 100). Judgments usually occur in the sphere of the indeterminate where probabilities concerning the truth of realities operate. Judgments are considered real only to the extent that a person's reports truly reflect his perceptions. It does not have the truth-revealing character of apprehension. Thus, judgment is a very secondary sort of thing, completely dependent upon perception for its confirmation. Problems in program decision-making occur when something, someone, etc., is incapable of being directly perceived, in which case only a vague report of the operating perceptions can be gathered. Then, judgments about their particular qualities and their mode of being must be grounded upon not a single report, but upon a number of perceptions-descriptions from a number of sources.

In considering the need for judgments in program evaluation, a more extensive examination of "judgment" is necessary. The concept of judgments as a "willed reality" evolves from imagination and personal valuing. Drawing from real experiences, imagination is a way of discovering and expanding existing potentialities, i.e., to really stand under the visible and direct and obtain meaning. The extent that possibilities revealed by imagination can go beyond the superficial and trivial, through the (genuine and creative) powers of the evaluator, determines the extent of utilizing the deepest character of the program evaluated and developing a better program (ie. a new "willed reality," or vision of the better). This component, therefore, becomes an actualizing component of potential rather than a component of the description of status quo. As Polanyi has stated". . . to see a problem and undertake its

pursuit is to see a range of potentialities, believed to be accessible." (1966, 27).

What seems to be operating in evaluation are levels of potentialities determined by degrees of imagination. Indecision and lack of active change seem to be based on man placing on himself all kinds of limitations to action. Status Quo proponents assume that which is in accordance with the rules is good and acceptable because it gives peace of mind, while actions which contradict the laws are bad and undesirable because they are unpredictable and create uncertainty. This unrealistic orientation accords primacy to as objective and empirical a world as can be controlled, and bans the place of words like 'subjectivity,' 'imagination,' 'tacit knowing,' and 'intersubjectivity.' In reaction to this behavioristic tendency, the perception based theory as presented in this paper will endeavor to:

- °holistically describe realities perceived by the evaluator and the evaluated
- °determine priority perceptions
- °make judgments based on overt and tacit value stances of both the evaluator and the evaluated

Furthermore, through a on-going negotiation process, predetermined operative values can be embodied in an evaluation paradigm. This negotiated paradigm delineates questions of major import to all parties; sources of evidence sought and an improved "willed reality" values of the evaluator and the evaluated.

#### Paradigm of the Perception-Based Theory

The total unfolding nature of perception based theory can be seen in the paradigm on the following page. As can be seen,

the paradigm calls for identification and negotiation of major questions to be asked. In the process, this might include both those cited or intended and accidental objectives. The second box of the paradigm is the accurate picture box which ideally allows reality to be described by others and these descriptions mutually agreed upon. The third box is the valuing or judgement section. In fact the inherent components of all three boxes consist of five elements: holism, helpfulness, evaluator vulnerability, acceptance of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of reality and a vision of the future. Thus, negotiated judgments arising from the participants' egocentric value orientations must be made overt in the process of determining major questions; in describing an accurate picture of reality, some judgments in terms of validity and reliability are involved; and the third box synthesizes these elements by providing a meaningful perception orientation upon which "holistic judgments" about programs are based and futures sought.

| Box 1                                                                                                                                                                 | Box 2                                                                                                                                                                                     | Box 3                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What major questions should be asked in the evaluation?                                                                                                               | What sources of evidence can be found?                                                                                                                                                    | What quality/value components will be applied?                                            |
| Questions having a holistic emphasis wherein all syntheses are repeatedly tested against experiential perceptions                                                     | Multiple methodologies are used in an effort to survey the "whole" of reality: e.g., descriptions, observations, subjective impressions, scientific method, etc. as stated in perceptions | Judgments and values grounded in perceptions and made overt                               |
| Questions which are helpful through a dynamic dialog, negotiation, and pedagogical action, makes visible the values being synthesized by both evaluator and evaluatee | Should be those sources which are closest in agreement with multiple perceivers                                                                                                           | Openness to seeking multiple dimensions of reality and the totality of experience         |
| Questions which expand the range of major questions asked by recognizing distortions of positivist and reductionist biases                                            | Both "hard" and "soft" data are systematically used to obtain an accurate picture of reality                                                                                              | Orientation to the future, extendability, and transferrability of levels of consciousness |
| Questions which emphasize the vulnerability of the evaluator in an effort to avoid oppression of evaluatee                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                           | Discussion, mutual responsibility and mutual criticism, and negotiation                   |
| Questions which facilitate the planning of program futures                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                           | Respect for core values                                                                   |

## Emerging Polemics Around the Perception-Based Theory

As we continue to apply the perception-based theory of program evaluation, a number of polemics have emerged. Upon consideration of these dilemmas, the reader will, hopefully, develop a greater insight into paradigm generation and its underlying theoretical base.

### Box I Polemics

#### °Holistic dwelling vs. "one-shot" reviews

Dwelling is seen a holistic way to learn a program's values, a goals, and objectives. In addition to reading program proposals and narratives and conferring with the program director, the perception based approach advocates "dwelling" techniques which permit the evaluator to approach the program more holistically. Some techniques include:

- talking to many different people representing all levels of the program. These discussions should be conducted individually. In concert with other techniques, these contacts can build multiple levels of mutual trust between the evaluator and the evaluated. In the course of these contacts it is advisable for the evaluator to demonstrate his vulnerability (eg. becoming a participant observer, acknowledging that there are "1000 ways" to do an evaluation, and attempting to teach the perception based theory through modeling).

#### °Major question generation: Evaluator paternalism vs. cooperation

Admittedly a large committee can not write major questions. Rather, it is a cooperative activity between the evaluator and evaluated. A helpful sequence involves all relevant audiences brainstorming important questions; the evaluator taking these brainstormings away and synthesizing the responses; and finally, the evaluator returning to relevant audiences with the synthesized list

and both the evaluator and the evaluated negotiating whether the resultant major questions represent important areas needing to be accurately described and judged. Thus, major question generation is a negotiation process wherein the evaluator and the evaluated share responsibility. Ideally, the perception based evaluator does not determine major questions based solely on the objectives defined in the proposal (ala Tyler) or according to some mysterious osmosis (ala Scriven).

°Evaluator roles: Responsible vs. Irresponsible

Areas of what the evaluation intends to focus on (ie. major questions) has always been cloudy in evaluation literature. Many ignore it, concentrating their efforts on developing intricate data collection matrices; others infer some sort of mysterious process whereby the evaluator divines where the evaluation ought to focus its efforts. From the perspective of the perception-based theory, it is the evaluator's right and responsibility to contribute his judgments of "good" evaluation questions and "good" sources of evidence. Furthermore, it is his duty to make overt what "good" qualities mean to him personally and simultaneously help the evaluated through this same valuing process. Only through mutual responsibilities can the evaluation effect an open, improvement-oriented perspective.

°Major questions and evaluations in general: client helpful vs. field helpful

The prime audience of the evaluation is determined by the evaluation model being applied. Analysis of the focus of published papers in the evaluation field has lead to strong inferences that prime audiences appear to be fellow publishing evaluators. From the viewpoint of the perception-based theory, "field helpful" evaluations have not contributed heavily to evaluations helpful for particular clients. The authors design evaluations with and for the client - any other audiences are purely secondary.

Box II Polemics

°Pre/post data vs. Formative Data

In order to arrive at an accurate picture of the program, the perception-based approach

strives to develop descriptive 'photos' of the program at any particular time rather than pre-post descriptions. This position requires an on-going data collection process which incorporates both "hard" and "soft" data sources. Ultimately, both kinds of evidence are grounded in perceptions. Furthermore it is the responsibility of the evaluator to create and organize instrumentation which draws upon and elicits process and product perceptions from as many diverse sources as possible.

°Opinions vs. Judgments

A distinction should be made between opinions and judgments. Opinions, whether valued or not, are considered data sources. Judgments, on the otherhand, are qualities which have been arrived at through a systematic data collection and analysis process.

°Instrumentation as: Focus vs. Power Test

Some instrumentation (especially observation instruments like Flanders) require comparing and totaling a set of items in order to come up with a behavioral composite. This procedure is often unwieldly and artificial. A helpful alternative involves developing an instrument composed of individual items which have their own focus rather than necessitating item comparisons.

°Catharsis vs. Alienation

An interesting outgrowth of perception-based data collection has been the use of instrumentation to produce audience catharsis or alienation. When the evaluated feel that data collectors and evaluators are sincere, respondents are apt to vent their (often hitherto unsolicited and valuable) perceptions about a program. Upon exploration of this phenomenon, many respondents indicated that even if their comments were not used as valuable inputs the process of eliciting their perceptions "made them feel good."

°Positive vs. Negative Orientation

If an evaluation is committed toward program improvement, a positive orientation, which stresses a programs accomplishments is necessary. Evaluation instruments which try to capture a program's failures tends to eliminate valuable data sources which contribute toward program improvement and evaluator credibility. This

is not to say that programmatic weakness are not collected or examined--but rather that these weaknesses are put in a developmental perspective. Specifically, we find it more profitable to ask questions from the perspective of "The project would be better if..." rather than "The worst part of the project is..."

°Instrumentation as: Building vs. Detracting from the Overall Evaluation

The tone of instrumentation and respective methodology can have a significant impact on the total evaluation. Factors that can facilitate or destroy an evaluation include:

-The extent of both respondents' and data collectors' knowledge about why the data is being collected and how it will be used. This can be facilitated by holding evaluation orientations early in the project's development. Also, frequent reporting to relevant audiences and clients should be scheduled. The evaluator is cautioned against the alienating potential as jargon and overcomplicated evaluation designs and reports.-- otherwise the evaluation may be facilitating sabotage!

-Another related factor to this issue concerns the role of evaluator as sincere vs. detached. The authors' experiences have led to the conclusion that evaluators who evidence a sincere concern about the project elicit more data, more trust in the evaluation, and more commitment toward program improvement.

°Neutrality vs. Objectivity

Much confusion exists around the distinction between neutrality and objectivity in making accurate descriptions about a program. It is the authors' position that neutrality does not exist--no one is free of judgments. Once data collection is initiated, an objective evaluator cannot remain neutral as he starts gathering/perceiving data. Rather, the evaluator must come to conscious terms with his biases, and determine and articulate his values to his clients. In this way, desired objectivity can be maintained.

### Box III Polemics

#### °Descriptions vs. Judgments

The perception-based theory views evaluation as broader than evaluators collecting descriptions and determining whether or not an objective has been achieved. Rather, an evaluation should strive to systemically collect perceptions toward a description so that respected judgments can be made. These judgments are the responsibility of both the evaluation and the evaluated. Ultimately, though, it is up to the client to make a final judgment which may or may not include the evaluator's inputs (ie. descriptive perceptions and judgments which can become sources of evidence for the client).

#### °Judgments: Focus vs. Exclusiveness

The third box never exists as a single pure event. Rather, judgments can be found in both Boxes 1 & 2. Some events where judgments are present include: acts of being judgmental about major questions being negotiated, the different sources of evidence to be collected, methods of analyzing the data, qualities inherent in the questions asked and determining qualities by which to judge the obtained data.

### Summary of Theory and Polemics

Even within educational program evaluation the major authors fall short of a theory that meets the criteria set forth in this paper. When one examines the works of evaluators such as Popham (1974) or Stufflebeam (1968) one finds the necessary components of a paradigm. But while their models are mechanically total, they exclude the negotiation of values in the first box and the mutual articulation of values necessary in the third box (see Part II of the paradigm). Michael Scriven, a philosopher as well as an evaluation theorist, deals with values but his external treatment assumes an elitist orientation. Scriven (1972) suggests that values

must be brought into the schema from the outside for judgments to be made, but does not set up the necessary dynamics of negotiations necessary for the first box. Robert Stake (1967) is concerned about judgments and values but does not include them in a paradigm that is holistic and he does not consider values as an integral component of an evaluation argument presented by this perception based evaluation theory that personal knowledge is ultimately the most vital information base to be used in making judgments and decisions. As can be seen in the paradigm, the distinction developed by this polemic is one of an accurate picture with predetermined sets of values and judgments.

By knowing what the picture intends to focus on (ie. in terms of major questions and what judgments will be applied) a holistic alternative can be developed which allows itself to improve programs. transcend quantification, and make vulnerable the evaluator to the evaluated instead of oppressing the evaluated with elitism.

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